

Part of an address delivered at Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Santa Clara, California on December 9, 2001:

On December 11th two days hence we will mark the three month anniversary of the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Two days ago on December 7th we marked the 60th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

However, there is a decided difference between these two devastating surprises. The Pearl Harbor attack was a tactically brilliant military operation on a military target, by military men with a certain sense of honor and bravery. The September 11 attack, on the contrary, was neither military nor honorable nor brave. This was an act like no other in history, one we may never comprehend fully. Those of us who watched TV, the morning of 9/11 will never forget the sensation of being where we were — and seeing what we were seeing — when it happened. That is how those of us who were alive at the time felt about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

What follows is my recollection of the first twenty-five to thirty minutes of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941.

On December 7, 1941 I was a Seaman First Class serving in the battleship *Oklahoma*. (BB 37). The *Oklahoma* was moored to and alongside USS *Maryland*. (BB46) in berth Fox-3 along the shore of Ford Island, Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. About 7:30 AM I went topside to the boat deck (two decks above the main deck) to my cleaning and battle station — Gun 8 of the port side, 5" / 25 Caliber, Antiaircraft battery.

Arriving at the gun I opened my tool box took from it a piece of canvas and laid it under the bronze foot rests of the trainers station in preparation for removing an accumulation of verdigris with a wire brush. While engaged in this mundane, constant, task for sailors, I heard, over the ship's public address (PA) system, the bugle call, "First Call to Colors", this was done precisely at 7:55 AM. (On Navy ships in port morning colors, the raising of the National Ensign at the stern is carried out at 8:00 AM.)

At the same moment I heard someone near by say, "Look at those crazy bastards dropping practice bombs on Hickam Field." This I had to see. Standing up and looking toward Hickam Field I saw a large column of smoke, dust and debris rising above the airfield. This was an unusual and disturbing occurrence. I wondered — what was happening at Hickam? As I pondered the meaning of this I heard the sound of an air-craft engine very low and very close. Looking toward the sound I was astonished to see an aircraft with a torpedo slung beneath its fuselage heading straight at *Oklahoma*.

Startled, staring in amazement, mesmerized by the sight I stood rooted to the gun platform. The aircraft, too close to drop his torpedo, began to roll into a wings up and down position. (The pilot evidently feared he would hit our towering tripod masts if he continued in level flight.) As the aircraft passed over the ship we could clearly see the pilot, radioman, and gunner. A large red circle painted on the bottom of each wing and a smaller one on each side of the fuselage identified it as a Japanese plane.

As this was taking place, the Boatswains Mate of the Watch passed the word, over the ships address system. "Air raid! Air raid! This is no drill! Set Antiaircraft Defense! All Antiaircraft Battery personnel man your battle stations!" (In this defense mode all other personnel were to go below the third (armored) deck for their own protection.)

Despite the shock of seeing a Japanese plane my training and self-discipline came in to play and I began to function as a gun crew member. Already at my battle station, I immediately cleared the canvas away from the platform and went about clearing the gun for action.

As I worked at this task I kept looking in the direction where the first aircraft had come. I saw another aircraft drop its torpedo, it was followed by more torpedo bombers all headed for battleship row. As their torpedoes hit the water and dove to their running depth their wakes became visible. I watched, horrified, but yet fascinated, as several wakes moved rapidly toward the ship.

The first one struck, a muffled sound of explosion, the ship heaved upward, a tremor ran through her fabric, just as it did when she plunged her bow into a large wave or the main battery of 14-inch guns fired a 10-gun salvo.

Instantly a towering geyser of water erupted alongside the ship. When the water began to fall back onto the ship we realized that pieces of metal were raining down among us. For protection I left the gun and dived under one of the ships boats, still secured in its storage chocks on the boat deck.

When debris stopped falling I realized that my next action should be to install the gun's firing lock. (The firing locks were always removed, in peace time, as a way of preservation of their electrical integrity.) I started forward along the boat deck to the, 5" battery armory to get the firing lock for my gun. My trip was interrupted several times by more torpedoes striking the ship. Each torpedo explosion was accompanied by a tower of water filled with debris. (Examination of the *Oklahoma's* hull after she was raised and dry docked in 1944 revealed evidence of ten torpedoes strikes.)

To escape the rain of steel and water following the explosions I retreated under an over-hanging bridge structure or other place of safety. One refuge was an athwart ship passage where I stumbled over the body of one of the men in my division. As he was obviously beyond help, I continued my trek along the deck to the armory. As I moved I realized that the ship was beginning to list to port.

As I entered the armory two petty officers followed me. We gathered up the firing locks for all eight guns and started out of the armory just as another torpedo struck. We retreated inside the armory to wait out the fall of debris.

As we came out of the armory it was obvious that the increasing list was making the port battery unusable so we moved to the starboard battery. Arriving at the first gun we inserted the firing lock in the breech block, hooked on the electrical cable and then again had to take cover from falling debris. When the debris stopped we moved back to the gun.

and opened the breech. We then made our way to the second gun to install its firing lock. By this time the rate of list was beginning to increase and *Oklahoma* was listing some 30 to 40 degrees to port. (Eventually *Oklahoma* rolled completely over, 151 degrees.)

While we were engaged in installing the firing lock on a second gun *Oklahoma's* Executive Officer, Commander Jesse Kenworthy, Jr. USN came down from the bridge ordering "All hands abandon ship." With the order to abandon ship the chain of command seemed broken and the three of us each took responsibility for himself. 3

I made my way forward and down a ship's ladder to the forecastle deck, went over the life lines and scrambled-slid, down the ship's side to an outward extension of the hull, (blister shell plating). I stopped on the ledge formed by this blister to remove my shoes and stockings, anticipating, but not welcoming, a plunge into the oily waters below.

Other people, having removed their shoes, sat down on the ship's side and slid down over the curve of the bilge keel and sailed out into the air and plunged down into the water. I shall always remember (with some amusement) the sight of our very dignified executive officer Commander Kenworthy, with his unbuttoned white coat flying out behind, as he shot over the bilge keel into the air and down into the water.

As I took my shoes off, and sat them down on the blister ledge I noticed there were at least a hundred pair of shoes neatly lined up, side by side, along the length of the ledge, as if the owners were preparing for bed, this despite all the stress we were under. As my eyes moved aft along the long line of shoes decorating the blister ledge they were arrested by the sight of the 6-inch and 8-inch mooring lines, that held us alongside *Maryland*. The mooring lines were rapidly shrinking in size. As I watched they parted in a shower of sparks and a loud explosive noise.

I also saw that one of the ship's 40 foot boats was still tied to the "lower" boom swung out from the starboard side of the ship aft. The boom moving toward a vertical position was dragging the boat up on the ship's hull. The boat appeared to me a perfect way of leaving the ship so I made my way aft along the "blister" ledge. Moving along the ledge I could see burning oil on the water around *West Virginia* (BB 48) and around the bow of *Arizona*. (BB 39.) When I got to the boat boom I was able to walk down the hull to the boat. I reached over the gunwale and pulled the pin holding the mooring line to the boat's king post. With the boat free I pushed it off the hull and jumped aboard. From the momentum of my push the boat drifted toward *Maryland*.

Hearing and seeing people on *Maryland* shouting and pointing upward I too looked up, and saw a cluster of bombs dropping from a squadron of Japanese horizontal bombers. Feeling very exposed and vulnerable I jumped out of the boat and into the water. Immediately I was covered with oil, but I kept the bombs in sight and it was a great relief to see their trajectory was carrying most of them away from the cluster of four battleships, *Oklahoma*, *Maryland*, *West Virginia* and *Tennessee*. (BB 43)

As I watched, the bombs curved away and started to fall around and on *Arizona*. I

watched, horrified, as one bomb appeared to penetrate the armored roof of *Arizona's* Turret Two. Immediately a tremendous explosion ripped through the forward section of the *Arizona*. Her huge tripod foremast fell forward and the ship was a mass of flames. A towering plume of smoke rose above her. I learned later that *Maryland*, *West Virginia* and *Tennessee* were also hit by bombs. To this day I remain convinced that the Japanese bombers were concentrating their bombing effort on the close cluster of four battleships, and that their aim was bad and most of their bombs fell onto and around *Arizona* leading to her destruction and the loss of most of her crew.

After *Arizona's* cataclysmic end I swam around to the stern of the boat and pulled myself back aboard. As the boat drifted toward the bow of *Oklahoma* I saw other people in the water and started pulling them aboard, one started the engine, another took the tiller and we moved slowly forward – stopping to pull more men into the boat. One man we rescued was the ship's Warrant Boatswain, (Bosun), he took the tiller and directed the boat and our efforts in rescuing more men from the water. When we reached her bow *Oklahoma* was completely capsized with her keel showing.

With the boat loaded with survivors we made our way to a float by the fuel dock at Ford Island. There we disembarked leaving only the Bosun and a boat crew aboard. The boat immediately returned to pick up more survivors. It was now about 8:25 AM, looking at my watch I found it had stopped when I went into the water at 8:08 AM. Two days later I went into a light cruiser, USS *Helena*, (CL 50) and began service in her. (*Helena* was sunk during a night surface battle in Kula Gulf, Solomon Islands July 5, 1943.)

What did Pearl Harbor teach me? It taught me something about life. Life as God would have us lead it. That is to find all that is necessary in the *present moment*. What really matters in life is what each moment produces by the will of God.... Our only satisfaction must be to live in the present moment as if there were nothing beyond it.

BB = Navy designation for Battleships., Numbers are assigned at the time the ship is authorized by Congress.

CL = Light Cruiser. Cruisers are not classified by hull size but rather by the size of their guns. Light Cruisers have five inch or six inch guns in their main batteries.

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